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ABSTRACT

Arthroscopic surgery (or microsurgery) is a significant breakthrough in treating knee injuries. Its applications range from basic diagnosis to arthroscopic menisectomy, although its use in some procedures is still highly controversial. Many surgeons perform the diagnostic procedure, but follow this with the conventional surgical approach. Therefore, if arthroscopic surgery is being considered, the surgeon's plans and capabilities should be understood beforehand. The arthroscopic approach can be superior to traditional knee surgery because there is significantly less damage done to the joint and the recovery time is cut in half. Not all surgical procedures can be accomplished via the arthroscope; some that can be performed are menisectomy, debridement, and chondroplasty. Further information can be obtained from the American College of Orthopedic Surgeons. (DC)

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(by: G. Patrick Connors, A.T.,C. M.Ed.)
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June 17, 1983

ARTHROSCOPIC SURGERY

QUESTION: Recently while participating in a 10K race, I fell and twisted my knee. The knee immediately swelled up and has remained swollen. It has been suggested by a sports medicine doctor to undergo arthroscopic surgery. Would you please explain what this type of surgery consists of and how it compares to traditional surgery?

NAME AND ADDRESS WITHHELD

ANSWER: Arthroscopic surgery is considered one of the most significant breakthroughs in surgery today. It is common for laymen to reference it as microsurgery. This is understandable simply because one usually returns from what use to be considered as major surgery with only three or four bandaids. This is accomplished by the use of special surgical instruments and a pen-like telescope which the surgeon sees through.

There are various surgical procedures that may be accomplished with the use of the arthroscope instrument. These range from the basic diagnostic procedure which most surgeons consider routine prior to a conventional approach of soft tissue knee repair, to the tedious procedure of an arthroscopic menisectomy.

It has been suggested by some leading orthopedic surgeons that all traumatic swollen knees should be scoped. However, this is still highly controversial. The Institute's orthopedic surgeons generally agree that if the clinical assessment is positive and an arthroscopic diagnostic procedure is possible, it should always be carried out prior to any conventional surgery of the knee.

In regard to an arthroscopic surgical approach, I feel it is far superior to any of its counter parts in the traditional sense. There are many surgeons that perform the diagnostic procedure, but follow this with the conventional surgical approach. Therefore, make sure you understand exactly what the surgeon is planning to do and what his/her capibilities are. To answer your question regarding how the two compare, there is no comparison. Whenever an arthroscopic approach can be used successfully, it should be used. Usually the recovery time is cut in half, thus enabling the individual to return to their full activity level much earlier. Also in the capable hands of a competent arthroscopic surgeon, the general outcome is greatly enhanced. This is simply due to the fact that their is a significantly

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less amount of damage done to the joint via the scope compared to opening the joint during conventional surgery.

In conclusion, I will simply say that if I injured my knee, I would seek the guidance of an orthopedic surgeon who not only uses the arthroscope for diagnostic purposes, but also has the ability to perform operative procedures with its use. However, please remember that not all surgical procedures can be accomplished via the arthroscope. Some procedures that have a proven track record for the knee consist of menisectomy, debridement, chondroplasty. If you have any further questions regarding the use of the arthroscope, I suggest you contact the American College of Orthopedic Surgeons for guidance.

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions regarding this article or any facet of sports medicine, write to the Institute for Medicine in Sports, P.O. Box 2621, Hamilton Square, NJ 08690 or phone (609) 586-4277. If you wish to make an appointment for physicians clinic, sports rehab/physical therapy, cardio-pulmonary rehab or a consultation regarding conditioning, nutrition and/or prevention call (609) 586-7900, X6677.

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